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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETTC](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: THREE GOVERNORS FIRED, THE QUESTION IS WHY?

Classified By: CDA Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (U) Summary. Amid allegations of incompetence and family scandals, three regional governors in Syria have been dismissed in the past ten days. Some argue the changes reflect President Bashar al Asad's focus on performance as a sign of seriousness on reform, while others believe the dismissals simply follow an established pattern that seems to repeat itself every two to three years. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The governors of Tartous, Hama and Damascus Countryside provinces have all been dismissed in the past ten days; alleged incompetence or other abuses have been publicly cited. The SARG has an established pattern of changing three to five governors, out of the total roster of 14 governors, every 18 months or so. (Note: The Governor of a province in Syria is an important regional official, appointed by the President. Many have backgrounds in the security services, military, or high-level Ba'ath Party experience. End Note.) In two of the cases (Damascus Countryside and Hama), the governors were fired for alleged incompetence, although media contacts speculated that they may actually have been removed for their efforts at reform: the two governors had fired several municipal managers for corruption or incompetence. In the case of Tartous, ousted governor Mohammad Salim Kaboul's unruly son may have contributed to his undoing. Scandals involving bullying and poor performance at school (an elite establishment for which he was not qualified) were publicized.

¶3. (C) Resident UNDP Coordinator Ali Za,tari told CDA on November 29 that he felt the dismissals (other than Kaboul) were unusual more for their allegations of non-performance of job duties rather than corruption charges. According to Za'tari, malfeasance in office is the standard reason for the SARG's periodic reshuffles, so this use of nonfeasance is somewhat unusual.

¶4. (C) Two of the new governors named are interesting choices. Wahid Zein Eddin, new governor of Tartous, used to be Assistant Minister of Communications and Technology, with a good reputation, but was purged by the new Minister; perhaps this appointment is an effort at rehabilitation, Za,tari said. The new governor of Damascus Countryside is Nabil Omran, who was transferred from his post as governor of Dara,a. His transfer, in contrast to the other dismissals, is widely seen as a promotion.

¶5. (C) Comment: Though SARG officials often talk about "cleaning up" the public sector, rumors abound as to the real reason two of the governors were dismissed. The question, some say, is whether the fired governors were really that much worse than their peers, who have thus far retained their positions. Determining whether the moves reflect a focus on reform, or are simply the latest manifestations of spreading patronage to loyalists, will require time to see whether changes occur in other aspects of local government.

